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4 May 1961

After Action Report On OPERATION PLUTO

1. Preparation:

On 28 March 1961 the LCI's *BLAGAR* and *BARBARA J.* departed Stock Island, Key West, Florida for Puerto Cabezas, Nicaragua, arriving on 2 April 1961. The two case officers of the ships, Mr. William Robertson of the *Barbara J.* and Mr. Grayston Lynch of the *Blagar* and the two ships' captains Mr. Ryberg of the *Blagar* and Mr. Shane of the *Barbara J.*, had been told that they were to lead and direct the landing phase of the coming invasion of Cuba which would be staged from Puerto Cabezas and all the details of the operation would be given us in Puerto Cabezas. Enroute we received a cable directing us upon arrival at Puerto Cabezas to assemble and test 36 small boats that were to be used in the coming operation. After arrival in Puerto Cabezas, the crews of the two ships carried out this mission completing it on 10 April. The briefing team from Washington arrived about 11 April and briefings were conducted on 12, 13, and 14 April. These briefings and the operations and administrative plans given us were clear and thorough. The *Blagar* was given the position of command ship and the mission of landing troops on both Blue and Green Beaches. The *Barbara J.* was to land troops on Red Beach and then patrol to the east to cover the landing areas.

2. Plan For Blue Beach:

The plan for Blue Beach called for landing two battalions, the *4th*

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aboard the Caribe and the 6th aboard the Rio Escondido, beginning at approximately 0100 hours 17 April in 4 LCPV's. Three LCU's preloaded with tanks, trucks and other vehicles were aboard a Navy LSD which would rendezvous with us five miles from Blue Beach and transfer the craft to us. They were to land on Blue Beach at first light. After the landing at Blue Beach was well underway, the Blagar was to come alongside the Atlantico and take aboard the <sup>3rd</sup> battalion and with one LCPV following proceed 16 miles east to Green Beach, put the battalion ashore and return to Blue Beach to act as Command Ship and direct the loading of the cargo ships. Aboard each LCI was a thousand men pack of arms and ammunition plus some resupply of ammunition. This was to be on call for the brigade ashore. The landing at Green Beach was to be conducted as soon as we felt we could leave Blue Beach, but was not expected to be done until after daylight of the 17th.

The reconnaissance of the beach itself and the marking of the landing sites was to be conducted by the UDT, teams that had been especially trained for this job for the last four months. There were three of these teams: one three-man team in the Barbara J for Red Beach, one five-man team for Blue Beach, and one three-man team for Green Beach were aboard the Blagar. They were to land as soon as the LCI's arrived in the landing areas and while the LCPV's and small boats were loading the troops. It was felt that they would have about one hour to perform their mission.

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3. Plan For Red Beach:

The LCI Barbara J. was escort for the cargo ship Houston which held the 2nd and 5th battalions into the Bay of Cochinos and land them at the head of the bay on Red Beach. This was to be done utilizing the small boats (12) of the Houston. It was planned to load each boat with ten men and their equipment. After this landing was completed the Barbara J. was to escort the Houston back to Blue Beach where its cargo was to be off loaded by the LCU's. The Barbara J. was then to patrol for ten miles to the east of Green Beach.

In all this planning we were told that early morning air strikes on the air bases in Cuba were planned and that these would take out all of Castro's air force.

4. Movement To The Beach Areas:

The Rio Escondido had damaged her props on logs coming out of New Orleans enroute to Puerto Cabezas and could only do five knots so this ship was loaded first and left Puerto Cabezas on 12 April. All the other ships left on the night of 14 April and proceeded independently to an assembly area at point AA. The brigade commander and staff were aboard the Blagar. All ships arrived on station at 1730 hours 16 April and formed a column for the run into the beaches. The column was led by the Blagar and followed at 800 yard intervals by the Caribe, Atlantico, Barbara J., Houston and the Rio Escondido. At five miles from Blue Beach the LSD rendezvoused with the column and the transfer of the landing craft began. At this point the Barbara J. and the Houston left the column and proceeded toward Red Beach. The Blagar moved on up to within two miles of Blue Beach to launch the UDT teams. This five-man team and Mr. Lynch departed the Blagar at 2345 hours 16 April in a seven-man, Navy rubber

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UDT boat with a 16 HP silent motor. Two men were armed with BAR's and the other four with Thompson sub-machine guns. The team was equipped with a PRC-10 radio and lighting sets for beach and buoys for marking the channels. Escorting them part of the way was a 20 foot catamaran boat from the Blagar. This boat also had a PRC-10 radio and mounted one .50 and one .30 caliber machine gun. This boat was to lie off the beach and provide cover for the UDT teams.

5. Landing At Blue Beach:

The town of Playa Giron was well lighted and a cluster of very bright lights on the right of the town proved to be from the small group of buildings at the jetty which marked the right boundary of the landing area. At about 1000 yards out, six men were observed outside these buildings looking seaward. As there were no lights or noise from the ships it was assumed that they were merely coast watchers which later checking proved to be correct. The UDT team started into the beach about 300 yards west of these buildings and at when 500 yards out, all the lights in the buildings were switched off. The UDT team discovered a coral ridge about 100 yards from the beach running across the front of the landing area and one foot below the surface. They crossed this and started the boat into the beach. Fifty yards from shore a jeep came from the town down the beach road, and headed east and picked them up in its headlights. This jeep stopped directly in front of the team and turned toward the water throwing its headlights on the boat. It then caught the full fire of two BAR's and four Thompsons and was

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knocked out instantly. The team moved on to the beach and called the Blagar on the radio and told them what had happened. They also called for an immediate landing of troops on the beach before the enemy could rush in its troops. The team placed a red light by the jeep, moved toward the jetty 150 yards to the east and placed the other one; then moved out onto the jetty and placed the large white light to guide the landing craft in. While this was taking place someone pulled the master switch and blacked out Playa Giron completely. Three trucks were then observed moving toward the beach area without lights. These trucks discharged some troops who moved in on the UDT team who were in position in some old ruins on the jetty. The Blagar then moved in near the jetty to lend fire support to the landing. The Blagar was armed with eleven .50 caliber machine guns, five .30 caliber machine guns and two .75 MM RR. The militia was fired upon by the UDT team when they attempted to remove the red marker lights off the beach. This fire fight was in progress when the Blagar opened fire on the beach from a distance of 400 yards, clearing it completely in a few minutes. The only return fire was from one .50 caliber machine gun firing from the direction of the town. This fire wounded one man on the Blagar and then ceased fire. After about ten minutes of firing on the beach area, the Blagar moved back and the first two LCVP's came in. They struck the coral about 75 yards from the beach and tried to ride over it but could not. They then dropped their ramps and the troops waded ashore. The first troops came ashore yelling but once on the beach moved out quickly and quietly. The UDT team called the second two LCVP's to land and warned them about the coral and had them come in slower and to discharge their troops

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as soon as they grounded on the coral. The brigade commander and his staff landed in a boat from Blagar at this time and took command of the beach. His radio was not working so his messages were relayed over the radio of the UDT team. There was no opposition to this landing as the fire from the Blagar had driven the militia away and no firing was heard until the troops started moving through the town. Mr. Lynch then returned to the Blagar to direct the rest of the landing, and to prepare to go to Green Beach. The five men of the UDT team were left on the beach to find a landing site for the LCU's. They had the PRC-10 radio and the boat and motor. The landing of troops continued and by first light all the troops of the 4th battalion were ashore and the 6th battalion was starting its troops ashore using the small boats from the Rio Escondido. Two of the LCVP's were holed by coral and after making several trips ashore one was forced to beach itself and the other sunk but the crew was picked up and sent to the beach. The UDT team continued to search for a landing site for the LCU's with no luck until a local fisherman was found who showed them a passage through the coral that could be used at high tide about 0630. This was a narrow channel and could only be used by one LCU at a time. The channel was marked by buoys and at 0600 hours the first LCU landed. After this LCU was off loaded, it backed out and another moved into the channel. The empty one was sent to the Rio Escondido to complete the offloading of the 6th battalion. As this was taking place Red Beach called and reported they were under air attack by a B-25. About ten minutes later or at 0630 the first enemy aircraft appeared at Blue Beach. It was a B-16 which came from the east and strafed the LCU's landing on the beach causing some damage to the motor of one LCVP which proceeded into the beach under its own power. There were no casualties from this attack and

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all anti-aircraft guns were firing on the plane. It left to the west in the direction of Red Beach. As this plane was leaving two more planes were sighted coming from the west and fire was put on them before it was discovered they were a friendly B-26 escorting a C-46 for the parachute drop. When they were recognized as friendly the fire ceased. No apparent damage was done to the planes but we were told later that one paratrooper was wounded but jumped anyway. The blue wing bands that were to identify our planes could not be seen until the planes were overhead and proved to be of little value in telling friend from foe. The enemy air attacks, although practically continuous, were never in groups of over two planes each. Each plane attacked independently and when he had fired his rockets left immediately. The only types observed were B-26's, which strafed and fired rockets, Sea Fury's which usually only fired rockets (four) and T-33 jets which fired rockets also. The B-26's and Sea Fury's were usually brought under AA fire with some effect but the T-33's always came from high out of the sun and we were never able to bring effective fire on them. After the first air attacks I called the brigade commander on the radio and advised him against moving the Blager east to make the landing at Green Beach. The reasons given were that the departure of the Blager would leave the ships in the beach area without their most effective anti-aircraft fire. Also by this time we had lost 3 of the 4 LCV's and if the enemy planes hit us on our way down to Green Beach (a 2 hour trip), it might result in the loss of the battalion plus the command ship. I told him I could put the battalion ashore right away on Blue Beach by using the LCU's, and he could then start them toward Green Beach on the road. He agreed

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to this and two of the LCU's took this battalion ashore on Blue Beach.

At about 0700 our own B-26's were on station over the landing area and we thought the air attacks were finished but at 0800 a Sea Fury came in and dove on one of our C-46's that was returning from dropping the paratroopers. He came through our AA fire and made a firing pass on the C-46 which had dropped down next to the water and was staying within the harbor area. The Sea Fury was caught by our fire as he pulled up from his firing pass and started smoking and crashed into the water, exploded and sank. This cheered up the AA crews and other attacks later on were met with all guns that could fire. At about this time we received a message from the Barbara J. that the Houston was hit and sinking and that they would beach her. The Barbara J. was damaged by near misses by rockets that had split her seams and she was taking in water. She started out of the Bay of Cochinos to Blue Beach. At this time a Sea Fury came through our fire and fired four rockets at the Rio Escondido one of which exploded the drums of aviation gasoline on her decks. An LCU was at this time enroute to the Rio to take off this gasoline and her other cargo. The fire soon spread and it was apparent that the ship was lost. The crew started jumping over the sides and swimming away from the ship. All the small boats in the beach area headed for the Rio and soon picked up all of her crew. These boats were about 1000 yards away from her taking the crew to other ships when she blew up and sank. The depth of the water at this point is 600 fathoms. The crew of the Rio was put aboard the Elagar and the gun and boat crews of the Rio were sent to the beach. A message was sent to Headquarters advising them of the loss of the two ships and an answer was

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received directing us to take all the rest of the ships to sea and return and unload under the cover of darkness. At this time we were attacked by a B-26 and the fire from the ships and from a friendly B-26 send him away smoking. The Barbara J. and the two cargo ships the Caribe and the Atlantico were told to proceed ahead of us and wait 15 miles out. At this time I called the UDT team of 5 men ashore on Blue Beach and told them to return to the ship as we were going out to sea and return that night. They replied that they would stay on the beach and light it for us when we returned that night. All these men were captured when Blue Beach fell. The Blagar was to escort the three LCU's which could only do six knots. Two friendly B-26's flew cover for us on the way out although the wing tank of one was loose on the front end and was hanging down. These planes stayed with us until their reserve gas supply was gone and then one of them asked permission to drop his bombs on the Cienfuegos Airport on the way home. This permission was given and he departed. Results unknown. When we reached the 15 mile point we called the other ships and told them to assemble on us but only the Barbara J. showed up. The two cargo ships could not be found nor would they answer the radio calls. Soon after the Barbara J. rejoined us we were attacked by a B-26 and a Sea Fury coming from the beach area. The B-26 started an approach on the Blagar but was hit and as the plane fired its rockets it exploded in flames. The rockets struck 50 yards from the Blagar and the plane hit the water in the same place and bounced over the ship clearing the deck by only 20 feet. It struck the water about 100 yards over the ship and burned and sank. Parts of the plane

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were scattered over the deck of the Blagar. The Sea Fury did not press his attack but made on short strafing pass at the Barbara J. hitting her with two or three .20 MM shells. He then threw four rockets at the LCU's from a high altitude all of which missed and he departed. Two more attacks were made on us later in the day by lone B-26's none of which pressed the attack. The AA fire held them at a distance and they fired their rockets wide of the targets.

After dark of D-Day we continued south hoping to make some contact with the cargo ships but to no avail. Sometime during the night a message was received directing the Barbara J. to unload her ammunition and a 500-man pack into one of the LCU's for a run into the beach that night. It was felt that the Blagar should go because of the damage the Barbara J. had sustained; however, upon charting the course we found that due to the slow speed of the LCU, we could not arrive until after daylight of D plus 1. Headquarters was notified of this and we were told not to go. While the planning for the run into the beach was underway, some of the crew of the Rio that we had rescued went into the engine room and stopped the engines. They said they would not go back into the beach area without jet air cover. They were subdued and the engines were started again. Some of the Cuban crew of the Blagar were in sympathy with them and there were some rumors of mutiny. The day of D plus 1 was spent looking for the cargo ships which joined us late in the evening. We had orders to off load all their cargo plus the ammunition from the two LCI's into the LCU's and run it into the beach that night. We were told we must be in, unload and be off the beach by daylight. The LCU's were loaded

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and we started into the beach but again we notified Headquarters that we could not arrive until after first light. We were told not to go in but to stay where we were. All this time we were the only radio link with the brigade on the beach and they were sending out a steady stream of messages from the beach. Most of them were asking for air cover and air drops of ammunition. We relayed to brigade all the messages from Headquarters and from the air base. We were told that several air drops were to be made on the night of D plus 1 on the air field and the brigade was notified and marked the strip. The first air drop on the field was made but most of the chutes drifted off the strip into the woods. (These were recovered the next morning.) The brigade then requested that the drops be made on the town itself and the two later drops that night went there; one of them was right on target and the supplies landed in the streets and were quickly recovered but the last one was too close to the water and most of the chutes drifted into the sea. Some of these were recovered by small boats later on. We were also told that a C-46 escorted by two F-51's would arrive that night and land at the strip but they never appeared. One message also said that C-46's would land on the strip and discharge supplies and take off the wounded. The brigade was told to move its wounded (about 50 at this time) to the strip and they said they would. Later talks with survivors revealed that the brigade surgeon would not move the wounded to the strip for fear of losing them by air attacks. One C-46 did land at the strip at first light, discharged its cargo and departed taking one wounded man that the brigade commander had sent out with

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the situation report on the beach. This plane load was the last supplies ever to reach the beach. During the morning of D plus 2 the brigade kept reporting very heavy air, tank and artillery attacks from both north and east and asked continually for jet cover. These messages were sent back and we were told jet cover would be provided by unmarked jets and the brigade reported seeing them arrive over the beach area. We were not told that this was for one hour only. Later the brigade reported they were under air attack again and asked where the jet cover had gone. I could not answer this because we thought it would be continuous. The brigade also asked for close air support and sent back locations of troop concentrations and tank and artillery positions on the roads to the north. At this time the brigade was still in contact with the paratroopers to the north and was reporting them as being under heavy artillery fire and fire by tanks. The brigade reported three MIGs were over Blue Beach but it is possible they saw the unmarked jets and mistook them for MIG's. At 0500 on D plus 2 the brigade commander said that unless he got ammunition right away that he could not hold. I told him help was on the way and we would evacuate him. His reply was that he would never evacuate and that he would fight as long as he had ammunition. At about noon on D plus 2 the Blagar, the Barbara J. and the three LCU's loaded with supplies started for the beach. Our ETA was about 1800 hours. At 1300 I was told by the Navy and relayed to the brigade that close jet air support was coming. It never appeared. At 1430 the brigade commander told me that he was out of contact with all units, out of

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ammunition, fighting in the water and under direct fire from tanks 500 yards away. He said he was destroying his equipment and heading for the woods. He then went off the air. At this time Headquarters was notified and the convoy reversed course as there was no need now for going in. One hour later a friendly PBV came from the direction of Blue Beach and passed us going S.W.

6. Rescue Operations:

On D plus 3 we received an order to take the UDT personnel left aboard the ICI's (3 on Blagar and 3 on Barbara J.) and transfer them to the destroyer Eaton which was escorting us. This transfer was made using rubber UDT boats in very rough seas. Mr. Lynch and Mr. Robertson also transferred with the teams to lead them on the operation. The information we had indicated that the survivors of the Houston were on the west side of the Bay of Cochinos and were still intact. The night of D plus 3 was spent cruising the inlets and small islands west of the Bay of Cochinos looking for the Castro patrol boat SV-3 which was reported captured by our people. No sign of this craft was found and at first light of D plus 4 we sailed into the Bay of Cochinos and up to the Houston. It was aground about 200 yards from shore and the decks were just above water. There was no sign of life and no trace of anyone ashore. We came out of the bay very close to the west shore and searched it with glasses but saw no one. We checked the lighthouse on the island of Cayo Piederas and found one of our 20 foot CEF boats drawn up on shore. We blew the ship's whistle repeatedly and went up and down both sides several times but found no sign of life. We then sailed to the west of the bay and started checking the keys that run off the swamps on the west side of the

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bay. On Cayo Blanco we spotted our first two survivors. The destroyer was about 800 yards from shore and the men ran out on the beach and started waving their shirts. We picked them up by sending the UDT team in to shore in the rubber boat using the 16 HP silent motor. We then spotted other survivors and spent all day picking up small groups in the same manner. The destroyer then put its whale boat in the water to assist. Although these boats were forbidden to actually land on the beach they could transfer the survivors from the rubber boat and take them back to the ship leaving the UDT to continue their search. One UDT team of three men were put ashore and combed the islands all day to find the ones who could not or would not come to the beach. Later in the day two Navy A.D.'s, propeller planes, were sent to us. They flew very low over the beaches and swamps and spotted several small groups. The UDT teams were then directed to these groups by radio and picked them up. The search was broken off at dark on D plus 4 and Mr. Lynch and three UDT men were transferred to the destroyer MURRAY which joined us that night. On D plus 5 the search was continued by both ships. The MURRAY was given the west side of the Bay of Cochinos down to the first islands and the EATON and the CONWAY which also joined us that night had everything to the west. At first light on D plus 5, Mr. Lynch and three UDT men landed four miles south of the Houston and started to search for survivors. The coast was searched all the way to the islands but none found. We then started to comb the same keys as the day before and picked up several more small groups. Due to physical exhaustion during this period,

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I cannot remember exact days. I believe we spent three or four days on this operation and were at one time or the other on four destroyers, one submarine and the aircraft carrier ESSEX twice. In all we picked up 26 survivors and found and buried one man on the beach. These survivors were in very bad condition and had been without food or water for five or six days. Most of them had only underwear or parts of uniforms left and some were naked. In all only two weapons were found among them, one pistol and one carbine. During this time three Castro helicopters were seen to the north of us flying very low over the swamps and were observed shooting the survivors by submachine guns from the air. They were seen to land on two occasions. One of these was a two place helicopter and the other two large Russian types painted green with no markings. On 24 and 25 April I conducted interviews with 19 of the survivors aboard the EATON. The following picture of events on the beaches came from these men:

A. Action At Red Beach:

The UDT team from the Barbara J. led by Mr. Robertson landed at about 0130 and placed the marker light on the right side of the beach but was fired on from shore when attempting to place the left marker. This fire was from small automatic weapons and was silenced by the fire of the UDT team firing M1's and submachine guns from the rubber boat. The first troops of the 2nd battalion started ashore in the small (19½ foot) boats of the Houston and the UDT team marked the left of the beach with a flashlight from 100 yards out in the rubber boat. The second wave received fire from shore while on

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the way in. This fire was silenced by the Barbara J. firing over the heads of the landing force. The militia fled leaving some of their weapons behind. Once ashore the troops moved through the town and cleaned it out. The landings continued until all the 2nd battalion minus one squad was ashore and the weapons company of the 5th battalion landed also. (For more details on this period see report by Mr. Robertson on Red Beach.) One survivor, the Company Commander of the weapons company of the 2nd battalion stated that soon after daylight the beach was secured and they had captured over 40 prisoners. They discovered that 12 militia had been stationed in the town to guard a small militia radio station but that 30 or 40 had come in the day before on a picnic and were spending the night there. After the town was secured and the radio station was captured, the force which was under the command of the Brigade Deputy Commander sent a group out and captured a motor pool of trucks and gasoline at a motel and park construction project west of town. He also stated that 40 men from this small village offered to join them and fight against Castro. These men were put to work driving the captured trucks and other labor jobs on the beach. They were in complete control of the town and were not hurt by the air attacks which were directed against the town itself. These attacks and later ones caused many civilian casualties. The first attack by the militia came at 1000 on D-day and was from the north. This force was estimated at between 500 and 600 militia and had some tanks but friendly airplanes knocked out the tanks before they could go into action. This attack was beaten off with very heavy

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casualties suffered by the militia. As they were running short of ammunition a call for help was sent to Blue Beach and one tank and two 2½ ton trucks of ammunition was sent to them along the beach road. This arrived at 1:00 just as the next big attack was about to hit them and the tank went into action as soon as it arrived. This attack was launched down the road from the north. The troops, all militia, were in open, 2½ ton trucks and open, semi-trailer trucks. The fire of the tank and the 57 MM R.R.'s, 3.5's and the 50 caliber machine guns of the landing force hit them before they could get out of the trucks. This force was estimated at 1500 and all the survivors of this action claimed they killed or wounded over half of them and destroyed most of the trucks. The next attack came late in the evening and continued all night. During the night action at least five enemy tanks were knocked out, two Russian ones and three American Sherman tanks. These were destroyed by 57 MM R.R. and 3.5's. How many were knocked out by the tank is unknown. The militia at one time sent an ambulance under a white flag to pick up wounded but tried to sneak two trucks loaded with militia in behind it. The tank destroyed all three vehicles with one round and the machine guns finished the job. At another time some militia that were trapped in some buildings came out to surrender but when the CEF troops moved toward them they dropped to the ground and opened fire. All this group was then wiped out by the CEF troops. The survivors stated that all the troops opposing them were militia and all prisoners had the Communist party card on their persons. When asked about these cards they stated that if they

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they had no cards they could not get work. Most of the militia stated also that they were willing to fight against Castro. At about 0730 on D plus 1 the force at Red Beach was low on ammunition and was withdrawn to Blue Beach in the captured trucks, their own trucks and the tank. They took their wounded with them but released all their prisoners upon departure. They destroyed the radio station and all the trucks that they could not use. Upon arrival at Blue Beach they held a muster to account for everyone. Blue Beach at this time on D plus 1 was quiet and the survivors stated that they had lunch and slept, cleaned up and were issued ammunition. That afternoon they went into action at Blue Beach, fought all night and at about 1100 the next morning 90 men of the 2nd battalion under the command of the Deputy Brigade Commander (Oliva) was sent back to Red Beach to stop a large column of militia, tanks and artillery that was massing there. This force it is believed never reached Red Beach but it is known that they went into action because they called for mortar fire and the 2nd battalion mortars fired 120 rounds for them and then was out of ammunition. Two tanks went out with this group and was seen coming back to Blue Beach about 1300 damaged and out of ammunition. Nothing more was heard of this group and soon after the enemy force came down the road from Red Beach and attacked it from the west. This force was very large and had heavy artillery (larger than 4.2) and tanks. One survivor stated that at 1400 he went to Brigade Headquarters which was by the beach for ammunition and the Brigade Commander and staff were there but when he made a second trip at 1530 the Brigade Headquarters was gone and also a sailboat that was tied

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up near it. He states that starting at 1600 the front lines collapsed due to the lack of ammunition and at about 1700 all resistance ceased. He left Blue Beach with four companions in a row boat and saw many other small boats leaving at the same time. The enemy planes strafed these boats and caused many casualties. His boat drifted all night and at dawn they found themselves on the beach on the west side of the Bay of Cochinos. They then made their way down the keys to the point to where they were rescued by the UDT teams. One survivor stated that his company was hit in Blue Beach on the night of D plus 1 by a shell fired from a tank that emitted some smoke and threw droplets on their clothing. The droplets did not burn, but the smoke did and caused choking and pain. They ran out of the area and when they returned later they found several dead from this shell, but he claims there were no wounds and the men died from what he thinks was a gas shell. He also stated that the next morning several men told him of the same thing occurring in their sectors, also by tank fire. Detailed action on Blue Beach is unknown due to lack of any survivors who landed there in the original force.

B. Sinking of Houston:

The Houston was hit sometime after first light by rockets while still at Red Beach. These rockets started fires in the number one and number three holds and the Houston pulled out from the beach. The fires were put out by the crew and the ship turned and started back in. At this time she was hit the second time by two rockets fired from a T-33 jet. These

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struck the stern somewhere around the screws knocking out the steering. The ship was crosswise in the bay and could only go forward or backward. She attempted to back up but started sinking by the stern so the Captain ran her up on the beach on the west side of the bay. This was about five miles south of Red Beach. The planes came back again so the order was given to abandon ship. Aboard at this time was one squad of the 2nd Battalion and most of the 5th Battalion plus a 20-man ship's crew, approximately 220 men. Six men were killed by the air attack and seven more drowned swimming to shore. Small boats were used plus lines to the shore to get the men off. After everyone was ashore the C.O. of the 5th Battalion took command and organized a perimeter. He then sent men back aboard to try to salvage what arms and equipment they could. Some was gotten off but as the holds were filled with water, this was not easy. He then sent scouts out in the direction of Red Beach, but they returned and told of running into militia between them and Red Beach. This beach perimeter was held until D plus 2. Some food and water was gotten off the Houston but not nearly enough. On D plus 2 a patrol craft about 35 feet long and mounting one machine gun came from the east and pulled up the Houston. It is believed that this was the Castro craft SV-3. The boat checked the Houston and then came in to the beach to check the three small boats drawn up on shore. When it reached the beach, the troops ashore fired on it and killed four of its six-man crew. Two were captured. The Captain of the Houston then took this craft together with the C.O. of the 5th Battalion, the padre, two or three of the doctors and five other officers of

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the 5th Battalion out to the Houston and put aboard all the gasoline and supplies they could find. The Battalion C.O. then gave the order for the beachhead to break up in small groups and try to get out to the south. Some groups went to the north, some went inland but most started down the Coast to the south. The Battalion C.O. then left to the south in the captured boat and said he was headed for Grand Cayman. Out of the groups who started south down the beach 21 were later rescued, including some of the crew of the Houston.

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